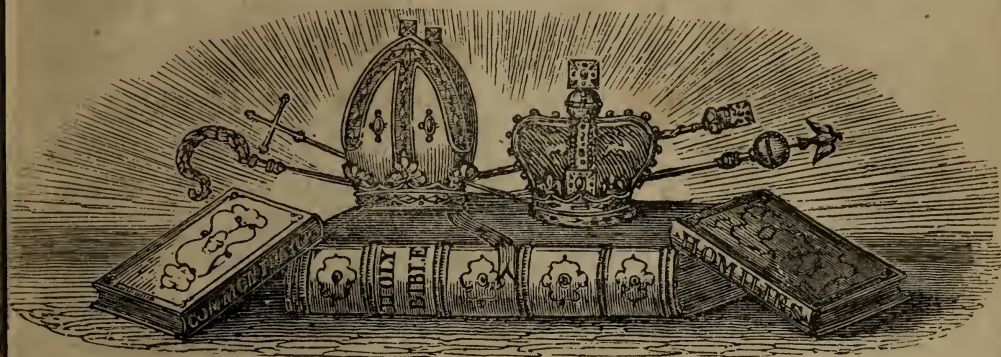


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THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.

“The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.”—Rom. i. 16.

THE Gospel, of which the Apostle here makes mention, is that message of peace and salvation which a gracious God has proclaimed to sinners, through his Son, and which is recorded for our comfort and instruction in the Holy Scriptures. It is represented in this passage as “the power of God unto salvation,” because it is the great instrument by which God has, in his omniscient wisdom, decreed from all eternity to restore a lost world, and to bring many sons to glory.

Nor has it been ineffectual for this great end; for, at its first breaking out, it was mighty through God to the pulling down of the strongholds of Heathenism and Judaism. And not many years after the outpouring of the Spirit, on the day of Pentecost, the Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and dwellers in Mesopotamia, who on that day of wonderful manifestation declared that they heard each in their own tongue, at Jerusalem, “the wonderful works of God,” had each in their own country the Gospel of the Kingdom preached to them; and many out of all these lands were gathered into the fold of Christ. And as the prophets of old had foretold that the abundance of the seas should be converted to the Lord, so, in process of time, we who dwell in these Islands were called from darkness to light, and, although once but Barbarians and Heathens, were made fellow-heirs with the saints and of the household of God.

The Apostle, in the passage that is before us, having had experience of the power of the Gospel in his own person, declares that he was not ashamed of it, as many were in that day; but, on the contrary, that he gloried in it. And so deeply did he feel its importance that he says, in the four-

teenth verse, that if in his travels he saw any town, or city, or country, whose inhabitants had not received the Gospel, he considered himself a debtor to that place until he had published these glad tidings amongst them; for he says, "I am a debtor both to the Greeks and the Barbarians, both to the wise and the unwise."

At the first publication of the Gospel, the state of mankind was this:—some who were God's particular people, whom he had chosen in the days of old, were in covenant with God; but the major part of mankind were in an unconverted state, having received no revelation from God, and possessing no means (except by the light of their own reason) of finding out the existence of God, or knowing his will. And in respect to those who were in covenant with God, this covenant was the old burdensome covenant of the law, which, having served its purpose, was now become obsolete and a useless encumbrance; as it is declared, (Heb. viii. 13,) it was "decayed, and waxen old, and therefore ready to vanish away." In the whole of this Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle argues that this covenant of works, which was only intended as a shadow of good things to come, could not justify man before God, but left him as it found him, in a state of condemnation to the law of God; and therefore it was necessary, in order to secure the favour of God, that there should be a better covenant, established on better premises, of which Jesus Christ, the Divine Son of God, was the voluntary Mediator. This new covenant therefore being established, there was now no salvation in any other; and it was the importance of this most vital truth, revealed to him by Christ himself, and sealed on his heart by the Spirit of grace, that stimulated the Apostle with such burning zeal to spend his life as the missionary of the Gospel,—that as this was the only means of reconciling man to God, so as many as possible might be put in possession of this means, and have the inestimable privilege placed within their reach. Being persuaded it was *the* power of God unto salvation,—not *a* power, but *the only* power,—he devoted his life to this labour of love.

The peculiar power of the Gospel consists in its satisfying that craving want of the human heart,—How shall man, a sinner, be accepted of a holy God? Whilst we remain under

the bondage of sin, and dead to its evil, we have no misgivings, and no apprehensions; but when the conscience is awakened, the thought that most presses on the mind is, "What a guilty creature must I be in the sight of the majesty of God!" Then the cry is, "How shall I come before God, or bow myself before the Most High God? What amends can I make for the evil that I have done? What shall I give for the sin of my soul?"

Now, it is to answer that demand of the heart that the everlasting Gospel is given to us. It declares to us that there is mercy with God, and plenteous redemption through his beloved Son; that we cannot answer to God one charge of a thousand, but that Christ has answered for us; that his death and sufferings are accepted as a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world; and that they who believe in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. The assurance of this salvation, full, free, and offered to all, without limit and without distinction, and on the gracious terms of faith and love towards the Author of salvation, is that which gives all its strength and power to the Gospel, and makes every other plan and scheme of religion, in which this great provision of mercy is left out, fade away, and be accounted as nothing.

But it may be asked, "If this blessed Gospel is so beneficial, so full of hope and comfort, why is it not received and welcomed by all?" It is because men in general are not convinced of sin, and do not know the extent to which they have offended, and are offending God daily. They do not see that man is born in sin, and goes astray from his mother's womb; that forgetfulness of God is sin; that unbelief is sin; that denying the Lord that bought us is a damning sin; that ignorance of the Lord that bought us is a dangerous sin; that the omission of duty is sin; that the imperfect performance of duty is sin; that want of judgment, if we have neglected to search and examine, is sin; that there is before God sin in every action that we do, even in our good works,—secret sins that we know not of, sins of the heart, sins of the thoughts, sins in words and discourse; and that there is not one of these sins against which God has not denounced eternal wrath. Men not taking this enlarged view of the amount and danger of sin,

but measuring themselves by themselves, and by others like themselves, and excusing sin in themselves, and calling it by gentle names, and, above all, overlooking the eternal consequences of sin, come to sit easy under the load of their transgressions; and this is the reason that the blood of Christ is little known, or, if known, is not duly valued; and even teachers of the Gospel, who ought to know wherein the great strength of this giant truth lies, often throw it into the background, and, without denying, slight it.

But the Holy Scriptures, which are the casket in which this jewel is contained, most fully and distinctly make it known to us that there is no other way of procuring the pardon of sin, and reconciliation with God, but this—this which is the crown of all revealed truth: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” “He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him.” “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.” “And as there is one God of whom are all things, so there is one Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things: and there is no other foundation laid than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ; neither is there salvation in any other.” Words cannot be more precise, more convincing.

So that we must conclude that no man can come with acceptance to the Father, but through the Son. But if the question be raised, “What then is to become of those who, with great sincerity of heart, seek by a good life, and by keeping the commands of God, to come to God, though not through his Son, because they do not know the Son, and the power of his sufferings, and the nature of that justification that he has wrought out for us?” Our answer in regard to their condition is, that if they are earnestly seeking after God in the best way known to them, and have a humble and teachable mind, and pray to be enlightened by the Spirit of God, God will at last find out means of bringing them to Christ, as he contrived so to bring the devout Centurion, and the Scripture-reading Ethiopian Eunuch, to the full satisfaction of all their doubts; but that, in the meanwhile, all that can be said of those who seek the Father, but not through the Son, is, that they are not at present in a covenant state with God,

or, what is much the same thing, they have no assurance from Scripture that they are in a state to be saved; because the testimony of Scripture is, that Christ is the door, and that if we enter not through the door, but climb up some other way, we are not accepted of God.

But in respect to the ministry of the Gospel, what shall I say of the criminality and the danger of neglecting this vital truth in our teaching? The criminality depends on the knowledge and intention of the parties; but the danger is greater than words can express. The essence of the law is thus stated by the Apostle: "Do this, and live." The essence of the Gospel: "Believe, and be saved." Now, they who come to God, and seek eternal life by what they do, and not through the appointed Mediator, however sincere, are under the law whilst they continue in that state, and cannot lay claim to the privileges of the Gospel.

And then how rich in consolations is the blessed Gospel! The great end of this message of love from the God of love was to comfort the feeble-minded, and to bind up the broken-hearted; and that, in the midst of the sorrows of life, we may not sorrow as those that are without hope. Negligent of the Gospel in the days of prosperity, we all strive to take refuge in it when the heart is wounded, and cannot be healed in any other way. But what is the well from which we draw these waters of comfort? Our consolations abound in Christ. The Gospel strain addressed to all who are weary and heavy laden is, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people: say unto Zion, Her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned." This is the balm that the self-condemning sinner requires to carry him through his spiritual warfare. It is the assurance contained in such passages as these: "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. v. 7, 8.) When the burdened sinner is bowed down under the intolerable remembrance of the past, stained as it is with guilt and defilement, it is not enough to say, "God is merciful;" the voice within cries, "But he is just, and I am unjust; he is holy, and I am unholy; and how can I satisfy the justice of a holy God?"

If God did not require a satisfaction, our own conscience would require it; and we never can rest until the suretyship of Jesus makes us sure. Then we are raised to a new life of hope and comfort. This dark cloud of overhanging guilt being cleared away, and having peace through the blood of Jesus, we are made fit and prepared to enjoy all those scattered rays of light and comfort that abound in every part of Scripture. Then you may speak of the merciful inclinations of God. We believe it all, for Christ has died for us. Then you may tell us of the electing love of God, who set his love upon us, or ever we were born, or ever the earth and the world were made. We receive it as true, because we are chosen in Christ before the foundations of the world. You may describe to us heaven, and all its glory. We delight to hear it; for we now know that it is a possession purchased for us, with a price that equals the value even of eternal glory. You may tell us of the dear children of God, and the tokens of adoption that are given to them, when they are sealed by the Spirit in the inner man. We embrace the word at once; for we remember that we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Disproportionate as eternal rewards are to our services, the services of Christ deserve them all; and being one with him, we expect to reap his reward.

Thus all parts of the Scripture are enlightened by the Gospel, and even that which is dark, difficult, and mysterious is cleared up when we see things through the mediation of the blessed Son of God. How great then must be the error of those who undertake to comfort others, and hide from their view, intentionally or unwittingly, this light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. It is as if we were to invite persons to a feast, and when they expected a feast, and not an ordinary meal, we were to omit all that serves to furnish out and adorn a festival. What a poor meal is religion when it is served up without the wine "on the lees well refined, and without the fat things full of marrow of the blessed Gospel."

The Gospel, too, when fully received, tends to bring about that blessed millennium, the reign of love in the heart. We all know and acknowledge that love is the perfection of the Christian character. Charity is the bond of perfectness.

Herein is our religion made perfect, when love casts out fear; but what is there that has so much the effect of putting love in the place of fear as looking to Jesus, who has quenched the fire of God's wrath in his own blood? The enlightened mind is at last brought to love God; but not so at first. God is far above out of our sight; he is the great mysterious, invisible One. Some signs of his goodness appear in his dealings with his people of old, but more of his severity; and therefore we believe and tremble. But Jesus Christ comes to us laying aside the godhead, and putting on the man—yea, the afflicted man, for no sorrow was like unto his sorrow,—and he shows himself to us, not as a “high-priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are.” And knowing that he has the sympathies of a man, and is not an awful mysterious, disembodied God; and knowing, too, that we share in his sympathies, and that if we are his members, the very meanest of his members, the Head feels for us;—knowing this, we love him with all the tenderness and affection of a personal friend who has made himself dear to us. If we desire to have divine love, which is the root of all excellence, kindled in our hearts, where are we so likely to feel it as when we place ourselves before the cross of Christ, and look up with the eye of faith on that bleeding, agonizing object that is there presented; and when, at the same time, we call to remembrance all that we have done to make God angry with us, all the rebellion, and the negligence, the backslidings, the inconsistencies of years and years of our past life, and then say to ourselves, yet there is hope for me—these wounds, these sufferings, this awful death that blotted out the light of the sun, is the ground of my hope? There is a voice from that cross that reaches our hearts: a malefactor dying for his crimes has, with his expiring breath, asked forgiveness, and the voice says, “This day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” And then, after thus musing on the cross of Christ, with all its accompaniments, we go away and feel a love burning in our hearts which no tongue can express: “Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

And now as the love of Christ begins to reign within us,

it extends to all other things with which we connect the name of Christ; we bless God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; we love the brotherhood, because we are all one in Christ Jesus; we look with hope and not with fear to the last day, because it is the day of Christ's appearing, "when he will be glorified in his saints, and admired of all them that believe in him." Whatever belongs to Christ we love, because we love Christ, as he loved us intensely: his name, his day, his people, his ordinances we love; and, above all, that ordinance which assists us more especially to hold communion with a dying Saviour, and to see in the holy elements his mangled body and his poured out blood signified to us. When the love of Christ abounds in us, how does this endear this blessed memorial to us, and what thoughts of love gather around it as we draw near with faith to take this holy sacrament to our comfort!

But there is but a small step from love to obedience; and therefore we find, as we should expect, that the Gospel, when fully understood, is most powerful in enforcing a holy and obedient life. What heart of man that is rivetted on the cross of Christ can resist that appeal, "If ye love me, keep my commandments?" When challenged, we are ready to cry out with Peter, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee:" and then Christ lays hold of that feeling, and says, "Keep my commandments; ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." We know that we ought to love one another, because we are taught it of God; nay, it is the natural dictate of our own hearts; but how does this saying strengthen the tie: "As Christ laid down his life for us, so we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren!" When we are falsely accused, misrepresented, and abused, how does it pacify the ruffled spirit to recollect that when Christ was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead unto sin, should live unto righteousness." How meekly do we acquiesce in the will of God, and learn to take patiently the chastisement of the Lord, when we call to mind the bitterness of that cup which he drained for us! Hard it is to part from some besetting sin, or from some cherished idol, and to pluck out the right eye, and cut off the

right hand; yet if we are always meditating on the cross of Christ, and our best hope hangs upon it, the spirit of our crucified Master enters into us, and we daily bear our cross, and daily mortify sin, following him.

Does the Gospel then slacken the nerve of obedience in any of us? Does its voice of comfort, whilst it soothes the heart, serve to make us less watchful against sin, and more prone to compromise conscience, and to excuse ourselves in weak and sinful indulgences? If so, this is no proof that the Gospel has this tendency, but that we do not know the Gospel, or wilfully abuse it. The Gospel is the kingdom of God within us; and when this kingdom is established in the heart, its tendency is to rule all our actions, to put down all rivals, to make war against all sin, to comfort us for the past, that it may strengthen us for the future. And they whose heart glows with the love of Christ, and who are continually feasting on the promises of his word, are prepared, and none but they can be prepared, to receive that great practical principle of the Gospel, universal obedience; the offering up of ourselves, body and soul, to God, as a living sacrifice; "so that whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God." To do something for God, seems reasonable even to the natural man; but to do all things for God, to have the glory of God in our mind at all times, and in all places, when we sit in the house, and when we walk by the way,—in the shop, in the farm, in the market,—this is an intolerable bondage until the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost soften the yoke, and make it sit easy upon us.

But let us observe the working of the Gospel in daily life. There are two persons; the one, decent, orderly, sober, with the form of religion, yet without Christ in the heart; at first we may entertain some favorable thoughts of him; but the closer we look into the common walk of the man, his temper, and conversation, the more we are disappointed: the other, gentle, peaceable, humble, preferring all men to himself, contrite under sin as feeling his guilt, watchful against sin as knowing his danger, tender-hearted, as one who had been tenderly treated himself, not selfish, not wedded to the world, and the things of the world; this man bears a peculiar stamp,

he is a peculiar person: what is the reason? I search and find that he carries the cross in his heart. And thus these two persons setting out on the race of the day from two different points, it is no wonder they do not run the same course.

Each day as it passes has its events. Our blessed Lord says, "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof;" but he has armed us sufficiently against these evils. And what is the armour he furnishes us with? It is himself—himself living, and himself dying; living, as a perfect example to us; dying, that we may not die eternally: and therefore the Apostle says, "Since Christ suffered for sins in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind." The cross of Christ is the poor man's book; he that hath no other knowledge save "Jesus Christ, and him crucified," yet, if he knows this lesson by heart, is wise unto salvation. The cross of Christ is to him in the place of all doctrine, and all precept; he follows the cross in all things; if he has to endure and submit, he looks at the cross; if he has to struggle and overcome, he looks at the cross; the cross is always in his eye, apprehended by faith, not by sense; the thing signified, not the sign; the very thing itself implanted in his heart of hearts, and continually rising before him whenever the occasion requires, comforting him in every spiritual trial, and nerving and strengthening him in every spiritual combat.

And every day likewise has its duties. Who knows but the true believer what duty really is? You say to another, Pray; but how can he pray whose heart has never been broken for sin? You say, Come to church; but his soul does not thirst for the fountain of living waters, and he does not come. Then you say, It is your duty, and you must come. Then because it is his duty he comes; but though you are satisfied with his coming, he is not satisfied, for his heart tells him there is one thing lacking yet. Alas! we find that persuading men to go through a round of duty before Christ is formed in the heart, the spring of peace and comfort and holiness, is like attempting to drive the camel through his desert journey before he has refreshed himself from the living spring, and laid by in his double stomach a stock of refreshment for his weary way. But if the believer carries his comforts and his principles with him rooted in his mind, duty is

no longer duty; it is transfigured before him, and becomes his pleasure. Thoughts of God, his beloved Father in heaven,—thoughts of Jesus, and how he loves to see us doing good, and approving ourselves in the sight of all men, cluster (if I may so speak) about every duty; the business of the world, with Christ in the heart, becomes the service of God;—and then we no longer turn from our poor, common, everyday employments as so insignificant, and so lamely performed, and cry out, “It is all vanity! and what profit is there in all my labour under the sun?” For if we believe, we know that these little things are great things before God; and if we are accepted in the Beloved, all our works, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, are also accepted in the Beloved.

And every day has its sins,—open sins, that are as plain as the noon-day,—and secret sins, that steal upon us unawares, that catch us off our guard, even in the midst of doing good, and spoil many a duty, as one dead fly spoils a whole box of precious ointment. And intolerable would be this load of daily sins, happening again and again, day after day,—things done which we ought not to have done, and things left undone which we ought to have done,—if we had not the assurance that “there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,” and that, “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

And if we make it our practice every day, as we well might, to call to our mind our baptismal vow, how does this bring Christ fresh to our remembrance every day! Have we been baptized unto Christ? then we have the cross written on our foreheads, and on our hearts: we are the soldiers of the cross to fight against all spiritual enemies; and we are penitents, weeping at the foot of the cross, waiting for mercy and forgiveness. On the Sabbath-day, when we join in the prayers of the Church, if we bring Christ with us to church, engrafted in our hearts, then he whom our souls love above all, and trust in above all, shines forth in every part of that beautiful service, and the form kindles into life, and we cry out with all our hearts, “O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us!” and we pray earnestly, “by thy cross and passion, by thine agony and bloody sweat, good Lord, deliver us!” And so as one day passes

after another, it will bring us in due time to the last day; and then how shall we go through the trials of our last day, and the duties of our last day, if we have not learned by daily exercise to lay hold of the cross, whenever the poor heart fails and wants support! But to him who has long conquered, through the cross, grace will be given to conquer still; and he will die, as he lived, looking to Jesus, and "receiving out of his fulness, and grace for grace."

Since the Gospel, then, has all this power over the heart and life of the believer, let us now consider what is the Christian's state, what is the frame of his mind, and his general character, as it is found, after making all allowances for man's failings and imperfections. Is it, as those who look at it from a distance suppose, generally a state of bondage and constraint, joyless and comfortless? No. It is generally the very reverse, a state of light, liberty, and comfort, with a sweet spring of divine peace bubbling up from the depth of his heart. Of course these sensible comforts are changeable, as all things on earth are changeable; and circumstances that are painful to others are also painful to the child of God, and the sky of his spiritual comforts is sometimes overcast in a way that is mysterious even to himself. But upon the whole, it will be found that the general state of the Christian is a state of peace and comfort. The *frame* of the Christian may vary day by day; but the *state* of the Christian is more fixed and established, and its polar star is comfort,—and why? Because Christ is with him, and manifests himself to him as he does not to the world; and if Christ is in the ship with us, we know that we are as safe in the storm as in the sunshine.

How interesting, then, is the Christian's experience! It looks from the present to the past, and on all builds hope with respect to the future. "Tribulation worketh patience, patience experience, and experience hope." The inward life of the Christian is a complete history, full of stirring events, of changes and revolutions, of battles and victories, and sometimes sad defeats. How vividly does he recollect by what means God called him from darkness to light! how he was profited by that trial! how he was awakened by that sermon! how he was soothed by that text! how he was encouraged

by that friend!—how, on other occasions, he was beguiled by the world, soiled by sin, stumbled on the dark mountains of error, wandered to the brink of a precipice, and then was snatched away by mercy that is unspeakable, unsearchable! All this lives in his memory, written not with the pen of the historian, but on the fleshly tables of the heart. And if you want to know why Christ is so precious to him, you must have all the man's inward life and spiritual history before you; and then you will have some notion what makes him to differ from others. Where there is no love of Christ, there is no history; and where there is no history, the soul is a blank. And can we wonder that the power of the Gospel does not manifest itself in such persons?

But, notwithstanding this, we must confess, that if we turn from faith as it is set forth in the Gospel, and as it appears in the believer, we often find a great difference. Faith in the Gospel is all pure, loving, long-sighted, making things unseen as evident as things that are seen, and continually working in us love, joy, peace; but faith in the believer has its breaks and interruptions, its unbelief, its stumblings, its backslidings. Yet if it is faith, the true living faith of the Gospel, the root is there, for Christ is there, and as the Apostle says, "Therefore I do rejoice; yea, and will rejoice." It is true, sin *remains* in the believer; but it does not *reign* in him. With the sin comes the cordial loathing of sin; and his sins are generally sins of infirmity, and not sins of wilful and open rebellion,—sins in which he may be overtaken, but which make him more watchful for the time to come, and more given to prayer,—sins of misunderstanding, want of judgment, defective knowledge,—sins, in a word, that do not reign over him. For when Christ reigns in the heart, sin cannot reign at the same time; for if we are under grace, sin can have no more dominion over us.

And how often does evil work out good in the experience of the believer! This is the circle of faith in all that truly love Christ:—sin begets misery; misery drives us to Christ; Christ administers comfort; and comfort sometimes, through our frailty, puts us off our guard;—and this opens a door to sin again; heart sins, and sins of inconsistency, overtake us. This fills us with distress; distress brings us weeping and

broken-hearted to Christ; Christ heals us, and comforts us, but sends us away with this caution,—“Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” And thus the circle is complete. So that, upon the whole, though the Christian *frame* is very changeable, the Christian *state* is established on the solid ground of habitual peace, comfort, and holiness.

But another matter still remains to be considered. The power of the Gospel, great as it is, is not felt at once; it increases in us by degrees, and therefore it must be cultivated. To this bear all the Apostles testimony. What do we find in each of those holy Epistles written by St. Paul? These two things, with hardly any exception,—commendation of present attainments, with exhortations to abound more and more in knowledge and righteousness. In Phil. i. 3, &c.: “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you; being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.” And so in all his Epistles. Now this admonition to go on and improve would not have been given by the Apostle, if he had not seen, with the anxious eye of their spiritual father, points that required improvement even in his most hopeful children; and therefore, if we see not our need of improvement, we know nothing yet as we ought to know.

First of all, we must cultivate “the truth as it is in Jesus.” How dry and naked is the truth when it is only received in the understanding of those who profess it! When the Philippian jailer cried out, “Sir, what shall I do to be saved?” the answer of the Apostle was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” But if I were to say this to many a professor of the Gospel in our day, he would be ready to reply, “I am a Christian, and therefore I believe in all this as a matter of course;” and yet this professor may hold no more than the bare naked truth. Oh, how different is this from the same truth when clothed with all the beautiful garments of salvation! When faith is, as it appears in the believer, a full, rich faith, embracing a whole Christ, Christ in all his offices, in all his acts, living, dying, rising again, ascending into heaven,—and though in heaven, yet

dwelling with us in the Spirit,—our daily Comforter, our daily Guide, saying to us when we are cast down, “Fear not; thy sins are forgiven;” and when we are prone to stray, laying hold of us, and saying, “Follow me; take up thy cross; suffer with me; and thou shalt reign with me;”—how different is all this from the profession of a mere naked, barren truth!

And so we may carry our creed in our memories, and we may say, “I believe in all the articles of the Christian faith,”—nor can we deny that it is a good thing to carry our creed about with us, in our mouths, and in our memories; but if it is the *words* of the creed, and nothing more, then it is like the crust of bread which a man carries in his pocket to keep him from craving hunger whilst he is on his weary way,—but how different is this from the well provided table, the rich repast, which he expects at the end of his journey! All this shows us how diligently we ought to cultivate the truth, and not to be satisfied with a bare, dry, naked, tasteless creed. We must seek to know more and more of Christ, and of his salvation. We must search for these things wherever they are to be found: every point and particle of the truth that tends to warm our hearts towards the Saviour, and to set before us the glory of our purchased inheritance, must be as diligently sought for by us, and as carefully treasured up in our minds, as the merchant who trades in goodly pearls, or the owner of a field who has a treasure hid in his field, and digs for it. We must cultivate every grace, virtue, and disposition that adorns the Christian character. The words of the Apostle should be continually sounding in our ears: “I do not exhort you to love, and to faith, and to hope; for we are taught these things of God; but to abound in them more and more.” And let us keep in our recollection, that these exhortations to *abound more and more* had, in all cases, special bearing on the faults and errors into which believers had been betrayed, or to which they were exposed. This call to improvement in the Epistles is never an arrow shot at random. The eye of the Apostle was fixed upon a certain sin or failing, though he names it not; and the persons to whom he addressed himself understood and felt what the mark was to which he pointed, and in what respects they were required to improve.

Oh, what a dull, stagnant, uninteresting life is that, when there is no improvement, no correction of faults, no rising to greater heights of faith and love, no running the Christian race, forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth to the things that are before,—the sluggish heart remaining contented if there is a little faith, a little strength, and no more!

Helps there are supplied to us abundantly to assist us in making these spiritual improvements. First and foremost is the grace of the Holy Spirit, the author and giver of spiritual life, and of all improvement in the spiritual life. Those calls to improvement which abound in St. Paul are generally addressed to us in the form of prayer,—“making mention of you in my prayers, that the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, you may know what is the hope of your calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” We may indeed cultivate the truth, and collect knowledge for ourselves, and the doctrines relating to Christ may be spread more fully before the understanding; but it is the Spirit alone that can make the knowledge vivid, that can give life to it, that can shine upon it, and make it affecting to our hearts; and therefore, though by our diligence we may clothe the naked truth, we shall not see its beauty, unless the Spirit illuminates it, and brings it out of the shade. This help, therefore, we must seek above all others, and before all others.

And then, how great a help the Bible is to those who search the Scriptures, not like men doing a thing without an object, but with this precise view—to improve ourselves, to know more of Christ, in all the riches and fulness of his grace, as he is seen half hid in the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, and more distinctly revealed in the New Testament, where he is crucified before our eyes in the Gospel, and recommended to us in many a holy text and lesson in the Epistles! And none can tell, but they who have tried it, what an invaluable rule of life the Bible is to him who desires to correct his faults, and to become more worthy of him who was without fault!

And so hearing the faithful ministers of Christ from Sabbath to Sabbath, if we hear them not carelessly, but in the

spirit of learners, longing to improve in faith, and love, and knowledge,—this is a great help; and therefore the Apostle calls the ministers of the Gospel, “helpers of the joy and faith of the people.”

And how great a help is prayer, special prayer, prayer pointed to the sins, and faults, and dangers of each day as it passes over us, with earnest supplications for grace to meet every want and every temptation that is personal to us! And what a strong arm is the holy Sacrament, when we use it to this end, to help us forward in our Christian course, and to endear Christ more and more to our longing hearts! And great help is there in the communion of saints, and in that sweet interchange of holy thoughts and wishes, and explanations and encouragements, one with another; and therefore the Apostle says, “Comfort one another, and edify one another, as also ye do.”

With all these helps, therefore, let us earnestly covet to know more of the power of the Gospel. Whatever our present attainments are, let us not be satisfied with them: satisfaction with present attainments has its root in self-ignorance. If we knew our wants, and felt our wants, we should never cease to seek for those comforts in Christ Jesus that can meet these wants. If we knew our sins, and felt our sins, we should never cease to look for some weapon, some powerful text of Scripture, to overcome our sins. Nor is this useful and profitable only; but we shall find that all the life, spirit, interest, and enjoyment of religion consist in this growth. It is like a man who supposes that he is making a fortune;—how pleased he is in the midst of his labours! how he sings at his work! how light is every trouble! how sweet is every task!—and perhaps he is doomed at last to have all his hopes blasted by a sudden stroke of misfortune. Far happier is the thriving Christian;—whilst he is daily improving, sucking the honey of the Gospel from every flower that opens itself, and finding himself more and more enriched in spiritual gifts and graces, and more and more a match against his once besetting sins, and the former tyrants of his soul, he sings as he works, because the work of the Lord seems to prosper in his hands; and as he advances, his hopes become brighter; and to crown all, he knows that he cannot be disappointed at the last, for

his faith will end in sight, and his hope will be swallowed up in enjoyment.

But great as is the power of the Gospel, there are other powers set in array against it; and so many are these hinderances, that there is no place where the Gospel has free course, and is glorified as much as it ought to be. Let us consider, then, what these antagonistic powers are. There is, first, self-righteousness. Christ is the Lord Jehovah, by whom we have everlasting righteousness and strength, and we are accounted righteous through his righteousness; but the self-righteous man looks to be accepted of God by his own deeds and services, without any dependence on Christ: like the Pharisee of old, he goes about to establish his own righteousness, not submitting to the righteousness of Christ; and thus our own righteousness, standing like a dark body between us and Christ, eclipses Christ, and we cannot see his "beauty that we should desire him." Selfishness is another strong power that hinders the Gospel. We are taught in the Gospel to love Christ even as we are loved by him, and to love all others as we desire to be loved by them; and if we can do any good work to do it as a pleasure, not as a burden, and to consider it as a privilege, not as a duty, to contribute in any way to the cause of Christ,—who pleased not himself,—and for the benefit of those whom Christ has committed to us. But selfishness narrows our hearts, confines our views, holds back our hand, draws our purse-strings, makes our eye single, but single in following our own ends; whilst the interests of others, so far from being made our interest, concern us little or not at all. And the slavery of sin is against the Gospel, that commands us not to continue in sin, but if we have fallen into it to rise again, by the help of God, to newness of life. But if we are the children of God we cannot commit sin habitually and wilfully. And the world, perhaps still more than enslaving sin, opposes itself to the Gospel. The Apostle says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, set your affections on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God;" and again, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for our Lord Jesus." But when we would lift up our hearts to God, the world chains us down to earthly thoughts; and it is not the pomps and vanities of the world that so en-

snare us, but the lawful things of the world, our daily duties and our necessary occupations; so that the mind being filled with these thoughts has not room for Christ and heavenly things; and we find that what a man most thinks of, that appears to him most weighty, and in this way the present world comes to be over-rated, and the future world to weigh as a feather in the balance.

And there is the nominal Christian—the man who carries his religion about him like his coat, but which is no more a part of himself than the garment that he wears. In primitive times, the nominal Christian was a character never known. In those days Christians, as now, had their sins, their infirmities, their errors, and misunderstandings; but their Christianity was then a reality; what they professed was what they really felt, and what they actually practised. But now, how large a number—shall I say the majority?—are nominal Christians! that is, walking shadows, in respect to spiritual things, in whom faith is a dead letter, worship a form, religion a name, eternity itself a straw.

And there is too the false professor—the man who uses the doctrine of grace as a cloak of sin, and to bolster himself up in the ways of unrighteousness: are there such amongst professing Christians? Tell it not in Gath. Oh, how by these perversions of the Gospel do they occasion the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme! How does the unbeliever curl his lip with contempt when he hears the covenant of God with his elect people, so much honoured and gloried in by his people, made the means not of weaning them from sin and drunkenness and guilty pleasures, but a hiding-place where they may take refuge from an accusing conscience, or a sop to lull them asleep in the sins that beset them!

Such hinderances as these we must confess do prevail, and hence we find that the actual efficiency of the Gospel is not always what we should expect from its divine power; still it is a mighty and triumphant agent, and though hinderances are cast in its way, the wheels of the everlasting Gospel roll on, overcoming powers and principalities and opposition, which would be insurmountable by any schemes of religion which are of man's invention. Who can tell what victories it has already won over sin, death, and hell, abroad in the world,

and in the hearts of God's elect people? And the victories already achieved are as nothing compared with what are darkly shadowed forth in the page of prophecy. Already on the thirsty plains of Africa, and the palmy groves of India, and through the wild savannahs of America, do we hear the voice of man, even in his half-enlightened state, crying out, "Why is the chariot of the Gospel so long in coming? why tarry its wheels?" From the east and the west, and the north and the south, they are now looking for this great consummation, the preaching of the Gospel amongst all nations; and ere another century has passed away, there will be no nation probably under heaven in which it will not be said, when the Lord counts up his people,—This man and the other man was born to Christ there.

To this conclusion then we are brought,—that the Gospel is indeed "the power of God unto salvation" to every one that receiveth it. Other means there may have been before it; the voice of conscience in the breast of every man, the covenant of Adam, of Abraham, of Moses; but the greatest and best of all is the last of all; in these latter days God hath spoken to us by his Son: this is the greater light that rules the day, the others were but the lesser lights that ruled the night. And not only so, but now that it is revealed to us, it is the only power, for "there is no other name under heaven whereby we can be saved." The state of man, with regard to God now, is not a question of good works and bad works, but now he that is without Christ is rejected of God, and therefore all that he does is rejected; and this is his condemnation, not only that he commits sin, but that whatever he does is sin; that, in short, he is all sin before God because he is without a Mediator; whilst he that is in Christ is accepted of God, and being accepted in the Beloved, all his works are accepted for Christ's sake; and whilst works the most glorious in the sight of man are in the other case rejected, all the works of the believer,—his common every day duties, his eating and drinking, and all that he does, if done according to the will of God, meets with acceptance in the presence of Him who looks upon the face of his anointed Son, and is reconciled to us and all that belongs to us.

In his present state of warfare there are two enemies that

man has to contend with, the condemnation of sin, which brings guilt and misery upon the conscience, and the slavery of sin, by which we become carnal, sold under sin, and cannot do the things that we would. But if we are soldiers of Jesus Christ, we are furnished with a weapon that will enable us to overcome both these enemies: the cross of our Redeemer—the cross to comfort us by a sense of sins forgiven, and the same cross to urge and stimulate and provoke us, by the imitation of Christ, to mortify sin in our mortal members. So that the seed of all consolations, and of all holiness, is contained in this one word, the cross, by which we are taught to be alive unto God, whilst we are dead to sin, and to feel our hearts the temple of the Comforter. This is what reconciles us to all the ills of life. The Apostle says, (Thess. ii. v. 18,) “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, which hath loved us and given us an everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts;” and these consolations more or less are the portion of all those that believe. We are now sojourning in the wilderness of this world; whatever comforts we have, whatever manna is permitted to rain down upon us from heaven; yet we have our trials, some of them great and some small; the great to bring us occasionally into the depths of affliction, the small to harass the mind with daily vexations, and gradually to sicken the heart to the world: but all these point to the cross; they are all preparations for the receiving of Christ into our hearts. When we are tried, these trials, if we pray, prove for our good; that which has mortified the body is made profitable for the soul, that which has robbed us of our mercies has caused us to think of our sins; and then, what with our worldly troubles, and what with an evil conscience, if our hearts are broken, we are in a fit state of mind to attend to the Gospel, and we find that Affliction with a burdened conscience is the Baptist which is the forerunner of Christ to us. How thankful should we be for any visitation, though at the present it be not joyous but grievous, that disposes the heart to receive Him who can bless us with everlasting consolation.

Oh, ye poor! refuse not Him that speaketh from heaven, when he comes to speak peace to your hearts. It is said that the Gospel is preached to the poor; but it is nowhere said

that the Gospel is preached to the rich, yet the rich need it as well as the poor; but it is especially offered to the poor, that the poor may not be despised by others, and that the poor may not despise themselves. Let not your heart be troubled, neither be ye envious of those above you. Portionless though you are, and have but little on earth, yet if you know your privileges, the cross is your portion. You are invited to obtain an interest in Christ, and if the poverty of Lazarus leads him to Christ, he may have his evil things in this life, but his affliction will be now with joy of the Holy Ghost, and will work for him a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory in the life to come."

And if there are mysteries in the Gospel, and the poor are ready to say, These things are too high for me, I cannot attain unto them; yet, cheer up, there is a Comforter who will make all things plain to your understanding if you ask for his teaching: besides, though men in their vanity have raised hard questions, the way of holiness is a plain high road, and the wayfaring man, however poor, simple, and unlearned, need not err therein. When your sins rise up in judgment against you, and you look to the cross for comfort, and find comfort in it, then you believe; and when you strive earnestly against your temptation, in the spirit of prayer, remembering that Christ commands you to deny yourself and bear the cross after him, then you believe practically; you have then not only faith, but a faith proved by love and obedience, and therefore it is a saving faith. Simple and unlearned as you are, cannot you comprehend this? In like manner, if you have received Christ into your hearts, and you are glad to say, "Lord, I believe;" but complain that Christ is not yet formed in you, and that the truth does not come to you with power; then labour that you may have a more abundant entrance into this truth; pray, search the Scriptures, hear the word as often as you can—your hearts are not affected because your knowledge is barren; the truth is too naked, it wants clothing. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom; and the way to enrich yourselves is to gather up diligently every golden promise, and every gem of doctrine by which Christ is adorned in his word, and to lay them up in your hearts as your best treasures.

Lastly, if the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation," it is so only for a limited time: "Now is the appointed time; now is the day of salvation." The day of salvation passes away more swiftly than the weaver's shuttle; but how much depends upon our right employment of it: no less than eternity, with all its dark, mysterious, unfathomable secrets! Eternity is coming to us all; to many it is near at hand; what are these grey hairs, and these wrinkles on the brow? They are but the shadows that Eternity casts before him, to warn you that he is speedily coming. And when man lieth down, he riseth not again till the heavens are no more; and when he rises again, and the sea and the land yield up their dead, what is the spectacle that he will then witness? The end of all created things! Starting from his bed of dust, what does he hear? The archangel's trumpet sounds, the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the Son of Man cometh in the clouds of heaven, with ten thousand of his saints; and then all being prepared, and every ear and eye arrested, the eternal sentence goes forth: "Depart, ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels; but come, ye blessed of the Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." Eternity thus contributes its power to the truths of the Gospel.

Let me now finally address a few words to those who are charged with the ministration of the Gospel. The Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation," and this is the weapon with which you are armed. Your vocation is not to teach any religion or any morality, though enforced by powerful words and expressive tones, but to preach the Gospel, with power if you can, but at all events the Gospel—the Gospel "in season and out of season, with all long-suffering and doctrine." This is **THE** power; other powers there are, but they must all be put in subjection to this as supreme; spiritual influence is a power, but the gifts of the spirit are given us to glorify Christ; human learning is a power, but it must illustrate the cross of Christ; eloquence is a power, but it must win souls by its persuasion to Christ; the sacraments are a power—a mighty power—but they are nothing unless Christ is previously formed in the heart, the hope of glory. Whatever other doctrines are taught, whatever questions are discussed, whatever

stores are drawn either from criticism or from history, whatever texts are handled, whatever instruction in righteousness is given, yet all must be directed towards one point—the cross! the cross must be ever in the preacher's eye, though his theme may sometimes seem to lead him away from it. Every sentence that falls from his lips must have this object—to prepare the hearer for taking refuge in the cross, as his comfort under his sins, and to follow the cross as his example of self-denial, and putting away his sin from him. And let us not only preach the thing, but mention the name. There is a name which is above every name; there is a name at which angels bow down and worship,—a name that is as ointment poured out to the believer,—a name without which no man shall be saved. Let us not omit that name in our teaching,—the name of Christ, and the cross of Christ! Let us dwell upon it perpetually; let us roll it as a sweet morsel in our mouths; let us do as Paul did, harp upon the name, because the sound was sweet, even when his doctrine did not require the mention of it, as if the very name of Christ had been so interwoven with all his thoughts that he could not think of things indifferent without recurring to that dear blessed name. I maintain that a discourse without the *name* of Christ is not the Gospel, nor the preacher a preacher of the Gospel.

Let us not be satisfied with preaching duty as duty, unless the heart is engaged, and thoughts of Christ cluster round the duty; and as for good works, be it ever remembered that the best of all good works is, as our Lord says, to believe on him whom the Father hath sent, for that will beget all other good works in us, and will render all our works good in the sight of God, if they are done according to his word; and at the same time, that the worst of all sins is unbelief, because to the unbeliever all is sin, and, according to the words of the article of our church, “even his good works partake of the nature of sin, because they are not done as God would have them done, out of a living faith.”

But, above all, let us keep in mind that we are ambassadors of Christ, not to saints, but to sinners. What is the language of the holy apostle Paul respecting those amongst whom he laboured? “Warning every man, and teaching every man,

night and day with tears, we beseech you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God; be ye renewed in the spirit of your minds; put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, and work out your salvation with fear and trembling." And what does our own church declare in the Ninth Article, on birth-sin? "Though there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized," that is, the guilt and condemnation of sin is taken away from those who are baptized, and if they are infants the guilt of original sin is taken away, yet in *all* our Holy Mother says, "the infection of sin doth remain, yea in those that are regenerate, whereby the lust of the flesh in them is not subject to the law of God." Let us keep this essential doctrine in view in all our teaching, that we are preaching to those in whom the infection of sin still remains, and who require to be washed, to be justified, to be sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. And whilst we are instant in season and out of season in preaching the word, let us not despise other agencies, but chiefly let us teach our people to teach themselves, to be as much as possible their own ministers, and to search the Scriptures for themselves; and in visiting the sick and afflicted, let us instruct those around them how they may be fellow helpers with us in comforting and assisting their relatives in all the means of spiritual improvement.

Nor let the faithful ministers of the cross be too much shaken in mind and troubled, as if evil times were at hand, and swift destruction were coming upon our spiritual Zion. Why should they be so much afraid? Is not the Gospel "the power of God unto salvation?" and who denies that the Gospel is the light placed in the shrine of our church, and enlightens all her formularies, and all her authorized teaching? Let us keep the Gospel then, and the Gospel will keep the church; and they who spend their lives diligently, yet perhaps unobserved and unknown, in illuminating this little spot and the other little spot, both in town and country, with this blessed light, need not, nor I believe do they, think much or care much for the puritan or the pope, the meeting-house or the Vatican; for they know that there is a weapon that must prevail whenever it is employed—and that weapon they hold, and

wield it manfully—it is that Gospel which is “the power of God unto salvation,” and which is owned of God in every faithful ministry. Little, too, does such a man perplex his mind with questions as to the higher powers, dignities, and hierarchies, and matters of church and state. Where so many are disagreed, he thinks it his wisdom to be reserved, content to have the apostolic teaching ever in his mind; that the powers that be are ordained of God; that “helps and governments” are joined together in Scripture, because governments are helps; and that we are to shun all vain questions that do but engender strife, making it our study, as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men.

A power that overpowers all others is the cross to him who holds and teaches it; it is like the sun in the morning going forth in its strength, before which all other lights fade away and appear as nothing; and the difficulty with him is not to shun the controversies of the day, but to force his mind to give due weight and attention to questions of this kind, which though they must be weighed and considered, yet dwindle into insignificance when compared with the majestic grandeur of those truths, the resplendent brightness of those revelations, that are “the power of God unto salvation,” and which are summed up in one all-concentrating word—the Cross!

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